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ABSTRACT

The Master's Program in Counseling and Human Relations at Northern Arizona University is a broad-based professional preparation degree that attracts students from a variety of areas, including nursing, social services, psychology, criminal justice, and education. The program provides advanced preparation in facilitation of learning, understanding human behavior, and interpersonal communication skills. It is delivered through statewide programs to a heterogeneous student population. Two graduate students recently conducted an evaluation of the program, gathering survey data across the state from students enrolled from fall 1993 through fall 1996. From a total population of 655 students, 264 responded. The survey asked about student employment experiences, attitudes toward the program, and suggestions for improvement. Students found the program convenient and relatively inexpensive. They thought that the program should offer: certification in social work; more options for fieldwork; and greater course selection. A survey of employers indicated that they thought the program did enhance employee skills in areas related to human relations and data analysis. One area of concern for the program as a whole is the under-representation of Mexican American and Native American students, and another is the differing course preferences of the various career groups in the program. Appendixes contain the sample survey, a map of program locations, the program of study, and the Pennsylvania Training Model. (Contains four tables.) (SLD)

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Running head: INVOLVING STUDENTS IN ACTION RESEARCH

Involving Students in Action Research:

A Team Report on Assessing Needs for Program Improvement

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Abstract

The Master's Program in Counseling & Human Relations at Northern Arizona University is a broad-based professional preparation degree which attracts students from a variety of areas, including nursing, social services, psychology, criminal justice and education. The program provides advanced preparation in facilitation of learning, understanding human behavior and interpersonal communication skills. It is delivered through Statewide Programs, and serves a heterogeneous student population across the state, from the remote Hopi and Navajo Nations in the north to the border towns of Nogales and Yuma in the south. Because the students which the degree serves are diverse, meeting their needs is a challenge. Recently, the university funded an applied research project to better ascertain how this could be accomplished. Two graduate students from the program, trained in research and statistics, gathered survey data from statewide students as part of this project, under the guidance of their faculty adviser. Students enrolled in the program from Fall, 1993 through Fall, 1996 were contacted via telephone or mail. The purpose of this paper is to share the data collected so far and seek advice and ideas from others on how to analyze, expand and utilize it to improve service delivery.

Involving Students in Action Research:

A Team Report on Assessing Needs for Program Improvement

A portion of the mission statement for Northern Arizona University is to "offer graduate programs and support research in areas that are important to the development of the state and the region...by providing educational opportunities in both residential and non-residential environments and offer instruction through educational partnerships throughout the state that employ a variety of strategies to support distance learning." One graduate program with the potential for meeting the needs of a broad-based constituency is the Master's degree in Counseling: Human Relations offered by the Department of Educational Psychology. The theoretical background in psychology offered by this degree program currently designed primarily for educators could potentially be applied in a variety of areas, including law enforcement, social services, nursing, management and military science. To serve the needs of students enrolled in this program statewide, it is important that we continue to deliver a high quality education that has been tailored to assist them in meeting their goals and expectations for a graduate degree. In order to do this, it is necessary to examine the backgrounds, goals and expectations of the students. It is also necessary to survey and analyze the needs of the communities we serve with this program so that, through collaboration, we can modify and expand it, thereby bringing relevant graduate education to all regions of Arizona in an effective, efficient manner.

The M.Ed. program in Human Relations has been experiencing increased enrollment in most statewide sites over the past few years. For example, the Yuma site had 9 students enrolled full-time during the 1995-96 school year; over 50 students are currently enrolled. Phoenix area sites went from an enrollment of approximately 40 students during 1994-95 to over 100 at present. Despite this, there are still needs that

are not currently adequately addressed by the graduate program--specifically, needs of the criminal justice and social service agencies and the military installations that comprise a major portion of the employers of students in this program. Identifying these needs and working collaboratively with these agencies to improve delivery and relevance of the program supports the mission of the University and increases the effectiveness of NAU in providing accessible and relevant education in the areas it serves. It was the purpose of this applied research proposal to gather and analyze relevant data from statewide students enrolled in the Counseling: Human Relations program from 1993 to 1997, and then use this data to appropriately modify format and delivery of the program in collaboration with the major groups served-- specifically the military, police, health and social service agencies in Arizona.

Initially, several goals were identified and sequenced. The first goal was to gather data from students currently or recently enrolled in the Human Relations M.Ed. program at all statewide sites. These students were surveyed concerning their reasons for selecting the program, their current and desired career paths, their course needs and their expectations. This portion of the program evaluation was carried out by two graduate students, supervised by their faculty adviser. Students enrolled in the program from 1993-94 through 1996-97 were contacted via telephone or mail to complete surveys which asked the following questions:

1. Why did you choose this program?
2. What is your occupation?
3. Who is your current employer?
4. What is your long-term career goal?
5. What are your expectations from this program?
6. How well are these expectations being met?

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7. What types of courses would make this program more relevant to your career needs?

Demographic data was also collected for analysis. Responses were grouped by region and by occupational group. Gender, age and ethnicity were noted. This was considered Phase I of the project, and lasted from August, 1997 - December, 1997.

A second goal was to use this data to identify agencies, businesses and services in Arizona whose employees could potentially benefit from training offered in the Counseling: Human Relations program. These agencies were identified based on employment data provided by the students. Several were then contacted to identify specific needs and provide the foundation for collaborating to meet these needs. This was considered Phase II of the project, and was implemented by the faculty member in charge of this project from October, 1997- February, 1998.

Phase III is to implement program modifications based on the student, agency and community needs and expectations suggested by this data. Some of these are currently being implemented. As part of this process, employees of agencies and businesses who are able to benefit from the Human Relations degree are being utilized to enhance program delivery assistance to the extent feasible. For example, specialized courses still within the scope and goals of the program are being included at their request as course electives. To date, these have included courses such as graduate seminars in substance abuse counseling and family systems theory, as well as a variety of independent study, research and field work options. Agency employees who are also qualified instructors are teaching these courses. There is precedent for this model in Arizona. Maricopa County Community Colleges, for example, have similar arrangements with Motorola and Intel for many of their degree programs. Arizona State University and University of Phoenix also work jointly with corporations on undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Businesses with whom the academic institutions partner provide space, materials, technological support, or qualified instructors, as needed.

In addition to this interagency collaboration, the school counseling program is expanding at several statewide sites in Maricopa, Yavapai and Pima counties and will soon be available in Yuma, as well. These two modifications seem to address the majority of concerns expressed by students and their employers.

It is anticipated that this project will enhance the breadth and delivery of a broad-based, high quality graduate program needed in the State of Arizona while integrating businesses and community agencies into an efficient delivery model. It is to this end that we seek your consultative assistance. Data gathered to date is summarized below.

Method

Subjects

A total of 264 students, 25% male and 75% female, responded to the survey, out of a total population of 655. Total population consisted of all students enrolled in the M.Ed. Counseling: Human Relations program at Northern Arizona University from 1994-94 to 1996-97 and included 179 males (27%) and 476 (73%) females. Ethnic groups represented in the population included Native American (6%), Asian American (1%), Black American (5%), Mexican American (12%) and White (74%). Ethnic groups represented in the sample included Native American (10%), Asian American (1%), Black American (6%), Mexican American (11%) and White (70%). Mean and median age in both the population and the sample was approximately 37 years of age. The sample was determined to be a good representation of the population. Slight oversampling of Native American students occurred, due to selective response rate. This was not seen as problematic, as it perhaps better reflects the potential student base of the program in the state. Responses were analyzed by region. Regions included Yuma, Chandler/East Maricopa and all other sites, statewide. Areas included in other sites were Northern Arizona, Pima County and Western Maricopa County, where the

program was available during the timespan of the study. Demographics of respondents in each region appear in Table 1.

Table 1

Gender and Ethnicity of Respondents in Chandler, Yuma and Statewide Sites

		Gender		Ethnicity				
Site	n	Male	Female	NA	BA	MA	W	AA
Chandler	62	22	40	1	5	6	50	0
Yuma	50	15	35	1	6	9	34	0
Statewide	152	30	122	27	7	14	101	3
Total	264	67	197	29	18	29	185	3

Note. NA=Native American; BA=Black American; MA=Mexican American; W=White; AA=Asian American

Instrumentation

One of two graduate assistants called each of the students enrolled from 1993-1997 at either the Chandler or Yuma sites. The questions listed on page 3 of this paper were asked orally, and responses were recorded. A survey (see Appendix A) was mailed, along with a letter requesting assistance and a return envelope, to students enrolled at all other sites during this time period.

Procedure

Data was collected from August, 1997-December, 1997. First, lists of students were obtained from the student services offices in Chandler and Yuma. These students

were contacted by telephone. Next, a list of students previously enrolled in the program at all sites throughout the state of Arizona was generated by the university's office of student records. Surveys were mailed to students on this list, except for those at the Yuma and Chandler sites who had already been contacted, along with return envelopes. Many of the mailed-out surveys were returned as undeliverable. Internet search engines were used in an attempt to recontact the students who had moved without leaving a forwarding address.

Completed surveys were obtained from 86% of the students in the Yuma region, 78% of students in the Chandler region and just under 30% from other Statewide sites. Demographic information on the students who responded from each site appears above. A map of Arizona, showing the location of the regions, appears in Appendix B.

As data was being gathered, agencies which employed students were noted and contacted. Key personnel in training and human resources provided information to the researcher about agency needs. A list of potential instructors was also generated and vitas were gathered from members of this pool. Modifications in elective requirements were approved and implemented. Administrative personnel were apprised of progress and direction.

Results

Reasons for Selection , Overall Satisfaction and Expectations

The reasons respondents most frequently cited for selecting the program included convenience of classes in terms of location and scheduling. Many noted that the program allowed them to continue working while completing graduate education without relocating. Comparatively low tuition, in comparison to similar programs, was also noted. Utility of required coursework to current job responsibilities was also frequently mentioned.

The sample as a whole reported satisfaction with the program overall, but several suggestions for improvement were offered. These suggestions primarily addressed three areas: (a) certification in social work and/or counseling as an option of the program; (b) availability of more options for fieldwork, internships and/or research, and (c) grater course selection, including more psychology and applied counseling classes for elective credit.

Expectations cited included increased understanding of human behavior and development of skills to use in the workplace. Career advancement, increased opportunities and flexibility in career path and greater self-understanding were also commonly mentioned expectations. Most respondents felt these expectations were being met, but noted that some of the modifications suggested above would improve the program. Direct connection and application of material to daily life and career responsibilities was the modal expectation expressed.

Occupations and Employing Agencies

One surprise in the data, overall, was the number of students enrolled in the program who were employed by criminal justice and social service agencies throughout the state, or who planned to seek employment in these areas. This group actually accounted for nearly half (44%) of the respondents. Of this group, 50 were currently employed by social service agencies. These included Child Protective Services, Department of Economic Security, Catholic Community Services, substance abuse and family advocacy programs at the Marine Corps Air Station in Yuma, shelters for abused women and children, and Arizona's contracted state mental health care provider, the Excel group. 41 respondents were employed by criminal justice agencies. Major employers for this category were Yuma, Chandler and Phoenix police departments, INS/Border Patrol, and Juvenile or Adult Probation offices in Yuma, Maricopa and Yavapai counties. 20 respondents were employed in nursing or health-related fields by

hospitals, schools or the military. 30 respondents worked in the area of student services for one of Arizona's colleges or universities. The following campuses were represented: Prescott College, University of Arizona, Arizona State University, Northern Arizona University (Flagstaff, Yuma and Statewide sites), University of Phoenix, Ottawa University, Case Western Reserve University, Yavapai College and several of the Maricopa County Community Colleges. 15 students who responded to the survey worked in various areas of business, mostly in middle management at small corporations or as business owners. 83 were public or charter school teachers or administrators, split about equally between elementary and secondary levels. The remaining 23 respondents were homemakers, military personnel and/or full-time students who eventually sought to pursue careers in social services. Occupational areas are presented by region, along with recommended program enhancements suggested by students, in Tables 2 - 5.

Suggestions for Program Improvement

The majority of employers contacted felt the program did seem to be enhancing employee skills in areas related to human relations and data analysis. The primary need indicated by these agencies was development of a program which included coursework and possible in-kind certification for a social work degree (MSW) or a degree that resulted in licensure for substance abuse counseling and/or family crisis counseling by the State of Arizona. Many were willing to cover tuition for their employees for such a program and to contribute whatever type of in-kind support (instructor/trainers, materials, internships, lobbying efforts, etc.) was needed. Social service, criminal justice, military and medical employers contacted all requested this. Schools contacted in rural areas requested a program which would result in certification for school counseling.

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Students seemed to mirror this trend, reporting satisfaction with the program overall, noting flexibility of scheduling, availability of evening and weekend courses and low tuition as positives which should be maintained. Suggestions for improvement included requests for more applied counseling and methods courses, opportunities for internships, and availability of a flexible program which would meet state requirements for work in social services (MSW, Substance abuse or Family Counseling licensure and/or school counseling certificate.) Employers and students seemed to agree on the needs expressed. The next logical steps Northern Arizona University should take to meet the educational needs of the state appear to be:

1. Continue expanding the school counseling program to statewide sites. This is already in progress. Last year, 3 cohorts were offered in Maricopa County and 2 in Pima. We should continue working toward offering the program in Yuma next year, as well.

2. Allow students to complete fieldwork, internships and applied counseling courses as part of their electives within the Counseling: Human Relations program, and tailor these courses to the workplace and individual career enhancement needs of the students. This is also being addressed. A sample program of study with expanded options, adopted this year, appears in Appendix C.

3. Pursue the possibility, perhaps in partnership with other universities or agencies, of developing an expanded block of courses which could be added to the program to result in acceptance by the state of this degree as an in-kind MSW. A similar model currently exists in Pennsylvania (see Appendix D), and the major social service agencies contacted as part of this project are all supportive of developing a similar program in cooperation with Northern Arizona University. Arizona State University is working to develop a similar program in the Phoenix area, and should perhaps be considered as a partner.

Table 2

Occupations Represented by Respondents , Satisfaction Rate and Recommended Program Changes for Northern Arizona University's Statewide Counseling: Human Relations Program Enrolled at Chandler/East Maricopa Statewide Site

Occupation	% Satisfied	Recommended Change	% Recommending
Social Service	82	Internships	45
n=11		Applied Counseling Courses	36
		Certification	18
Criminal Justice	86	Internships	14
n=14		More Methods & Theory	14
		More Psychology Courses	36
Teachers	83	Internships	12
n=24		School Counseling Certification	92
		More Counseling Methods Classes	12
Medical	100	Opportunities for Applied Fieldwork	50
n=2			
Business	50	Licensure	50
n=2			
Higher Education	100		
n=3			
Other	83	Internships/Fieldwork	67
n=6			
Total		Internships	23
n=62		Applied Counseling Courses	13
		Certification/Licensure	44
		More Psychology Courses	16

Table 3

Occupations Represented by Respondents , Satisfaction Rate and Recommended Program Changes for Northern Arizona University's Statewide Counseling: Human Relations Program Enrolled at Yuma Statewide Site

Occupation	% Satisfied	Recommended Change	% Recommending
Social Service	83	Internships	8
n=12		Applied Counseling Courses	41
		Certification	25
Criminal Justice	71	Internships	14
n= 7		More Methods & Theory	29
		Substance Abuse Certification	43
		More Counseling Courses	43
Teachers	50	Internships	25
n=16		School Counseling Certification	50
		More Counseling Methods Classes	31
Medical	100	Opportunities for Applied Fieldwork	50
n=2			
Higher Education	100	Internships	25
n=4		More Counseling Methods Classes	25
Other	78	Internships/Fieldwork	11
n=9		More Course Selection	11
		More Counseling Courses	11
		Certification or Licensure	11
Total		Internships	16
n=50		Applied Counseling Courses	28
		Certification/Licensure	30
		More Methods Courses	6

Table 4

Occupations Represented by Respondents , Satisfaction Rate and Recommended Program Changes for Northern Arizona University's Statewide Counseling: Human Relations Program Enrolled at Other Statewide Sites

Occupation	% Satisfied	Recommended Change	% Recommending
Social Service	60	Internships	54
n=37		Applied Counseling Courses	43
		Better Instructors and/or advisors	32
		More Psychology Classes	49
Criminal Justice	80	Internships	50
n=20		Classes on crime & delinquency	40
Teachers	77	Internships	26
n=43		Better instructors and/or advisors	33
		Greater Course Selection	42
Medical		Opportunities for Applied Fieldwork	47
		Certification	53
n=15			
Business	50	Greater Course Selection	25
n=10			
Higher Education		Greater Course Selection	20
n=20			
Other	71	Internships/Fieldwork	29
n=7			
Total			
n=152			

Note. Resondents listed under the category of "greater course selection" typically requested more non-education courses and courses related to their specific areas of interest.

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Discussion

Despite diverse characteristics of various statewide locations, student and employer responses concerning program needs were similar across sites. The information gathered in this survey offers support for programmatic changes, as well as evidence that, overall, the program is currently meeting student needs comparatively well. One area of concern is the under-representation of Mexican American and Native American students enrolled in the program. The state of Arizona as a whole has a higher percentage of both of these ethnic groups in the overall population than the program enrollment reflects. Since many of the social service agencies contacted stressed the need for bilingual employees who understand community dynamics, members of these two ethnic groups should, perhaps, be targeted for future recruiting efforts. Another area of concern is the differing course preferences and needs expressed by the various career groups within the program. More attention needs to be directed toward flexibility in elective blocks and possible internship or fieldwork components tailored to the needs of each group. A cohort approach to elective blocks and/or internships for each career group, organized and taught by an adjunct faculty member who works in the specific field at one of the major employing agencies for the group, may be a viable option. Expanded opportunities in cooperation with other educational institutions may also be worth investigating.

The team approach utilized to gather data for this program evaluation may, itself, be worth considering for future inclusion as a research-oriented elective block. Involving students with an interest in research in the process of gathering, organizing and analyzing various types of institutional data as part of their coursework has several advantages. First, it offers hands-on experience and training they are not likely to

experience in standard courses. Second, it provides a more sensitive means of data collection for student respondents. Students are perhaps more likely to speak freely to other students, and their responses are perhaps better interpreted. Third, if properly planned and supervised, financial resources normally directed toward external research or expanded research departments can instead be used to provide additional financial support to students. Utilizing a student team approach could perhaps be extended into a variety of areas related to institutional evaluation, community needs, outcomes and other needed institutional research. Such a program option offers many advantages to both the institution and the students it serves.

Appendix A

Sample Survey

NAME _____

1. WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS PROGRAM?

2. WHAT IS YOUR OCCUPATION?

3. WHO IS YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYER?

4. WHAT IS YOUR LONG TERM CAREER GOAL?

5. WHAT WERE OR ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FROM THIS PROGRAM?

6. HOW WELL ARE THESE EXPECTATION BEING MET?

7. WHAT TYPES OF COURSES WOULD MAKE THIS PROGRAM MORE RELEVANT TO YOUR CAREER?

Appendix B

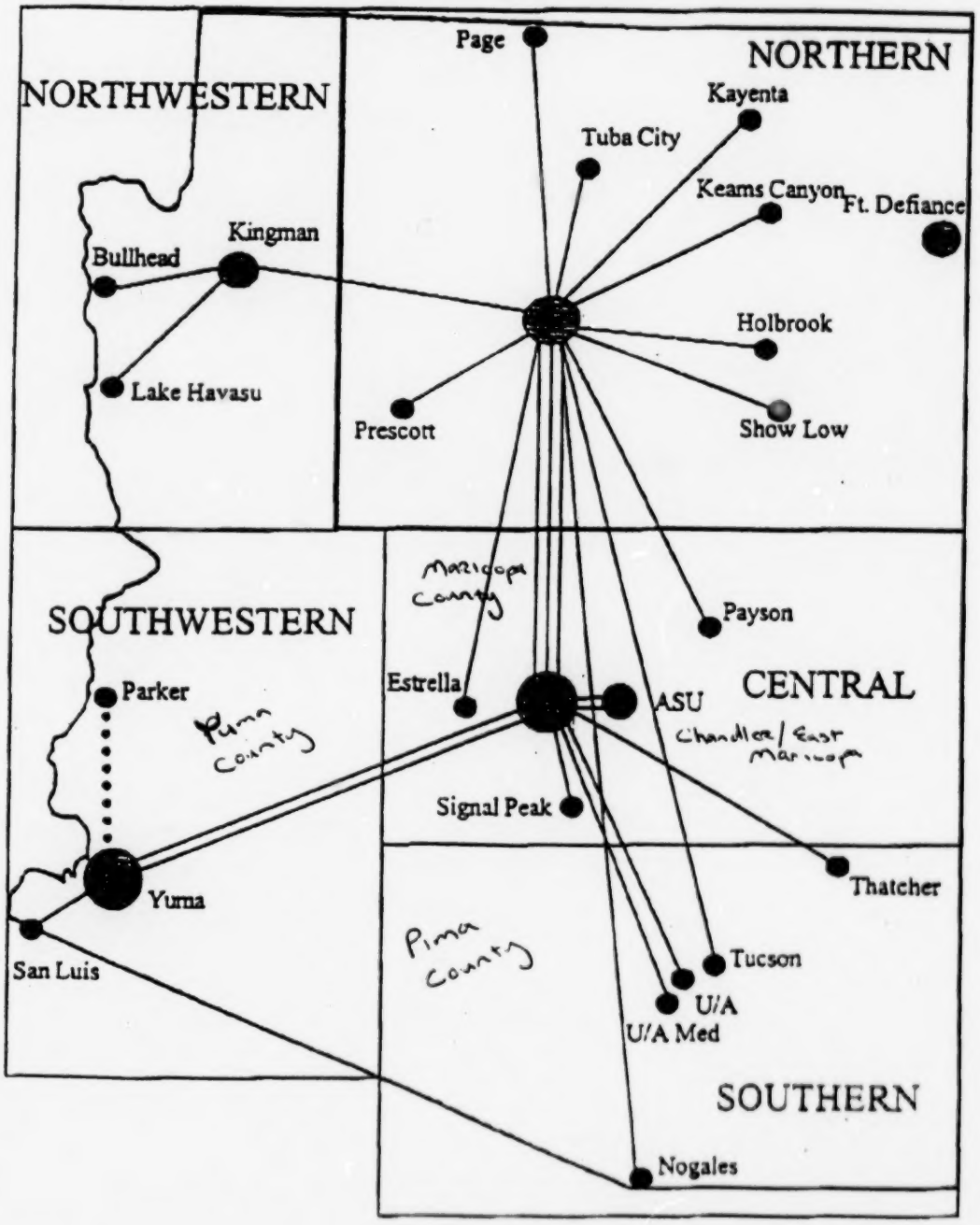
Locations of Northern Arizona University

Statewide Instructional Sites in Arizona

As of Fall 97

NAUNet

Regions & IITV Sites & Circuits



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Appendix C

Modified Program of Study

NAU
NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Y U M A

PROGRAM OF STUDIES
MASTER OF EDUCATION IN COUNSELING: HUMAN RELATIONS

NAME:_____ID#:_____

ADVISOR'S
SIGNATURE:_____DATE:_____

I. Educational Psychology Core (18 hours required)

_____EPS 580 Human Development
_____EPS 591 Personality Adjustment
_____EPS 605 Applied Educational Psychology
_____EPS 620 Vocational Counseling and Career Development
_____EPS 671 Consultation in the Helping Professions and **one** of the following:

_____EPS 595 Self Management Techniques
OR
_____EPS 606 Applied Behavior Management

II. Measurements (9 hours required)

_____EPS 525 Introduction to Statistics
_____EDR 610 Introduction to Research
_____EPS 664 Tests and Measurements (prerequisite: EPS 525)

III. Electives (9 hours required)

_____EPS 595 Self Management Techniques
_____EPS 602 The American College Student
_____EPS 606 Applied Behavior Management
_____EPS 610 Child Psychology
_____EPS 611 Adolescent Psychology
_____EPS 612 Adult Psychology
_____EPS 665 Student Services in Higher Education
_____EPS 690 Multicultural Counseling
_____EPS 685 Graduate Research♦*
_____EPS 697 Independent Study♦*

_____PSY 610 Psychology of Personality
_____PSY 620 Psychology of Learning
_____PSY 621 Cognitive Processes
_____PSY 635 Social Psychology
_____PSY 650 Physiological Psychology
_____PSY 677 Theories of Persistence and Change
_____SOC 612 Sociology of Education
_____ECI 599 Character Education*
_____ECI 630 Values Education*

♦ You can only use one such course in a master's degree program, and it can carry no more than 3 credits.
* With advisor approval only.

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Appendix D

Pennsylvania Training Model

Pennsylvania's Comprehensive Approach to Training and Education in Public Child Welfare

An interdisciplinary, competency-based program prepares child welfare staff to address complex family problems and administrative decisions.

by Larry Breitenstein, Judith Rycus, Edward Sites, and Kathy Jones Kelley

Photographs courtesy of Pennsylvania's Child Welfare Competency-Based Training Program

Preparing child welfare staff for the complex demands and challenges of their work has long been a public policy concern. Agencies and jurisdictions vary widely in their emphasis on professional social work education as a prerequisite for employment. While workers with undergraduate social work degrees are reported to be better prepared for child welfare practice, fewer than 25 percent of all child welfare workers nationally receive any preservice education.[1] In fact, tens of thousands of child welfare workers, supervisors, and administrators throughout North America are employed in agencies without the benefit of professional education and training. It has been recognized for decades that social work education alone cannot meet the learning needs of child welfare staff.[2] Continuing opportunities for in-service and on-the-job training are essential to address this need.

Such concerns prompted Pennsylvania in 1986 to begin to formulate a policy response to the problem of ensuring timely and well-integrated education and training for practitioners in the public child welfare system.

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Pennsylvania's public child welfare system employs more than 4,000 staff in 67 county-administered children and youth agencies. These agencies serve a culturally and economically diverse population in a variety of communities, ranging from large metropolitan centers in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to very sparsely populated rural counties. Some of the smaller agencies employ as few as three staff. The educational requirements for employment in these agencies vary from as few as 12 college social science credits to a master's degree in social work (MSW). Further, Pennsylvania's county-administered system creates considerable diversity in local agency philosophy and approach. These factors present significant challenges to any education and training system that strives to establish consistent standards and uniformity in casework practice throughout the service system.

Ultimately, through a lengthy sequence of developmental efforts, Pennsylvania conceptualized, developed, and fully implemented an integrated system of education and training designed to promote best practices in child welfare throughout the state. Pennsylvania's policy is

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Bonita Evans-Gondo, a competency-based trainer, leads a class discussion.

based on the premise that to be of value, child welfare training and education must accomplish the following objectives:

- Meet the individual learning needs of each employee;
- Prepare staff to help local agencies achieve their unique organizational goals and objectives;
- Promote achievement of the mandates and expectations of both federal and state human service agencies; and
- Be easily accessible and routinely available to all child welfare staff, regardless of their position or placement in the system.

Given the diversity of practice, the wide scope and variety of needs, and the multiple providers of social work training and education in the state, extensive collaboration was essential to achieve a system without creating or promoting redundancy. A unique collaboration between the public and private sectors, across disciplines, and among local, regional, and state administrative structures was created to design, develop, and ultimately manage such a system. This collaboration has been a significant strength in achieving Pennsylvania's goals.

Elements of the Training and Education System

The two major components of Pennsylvania's training and education system are the Child Welfare Competency-Based Training and Certification (CBT) Program and the Child Welfare Education for Leadership (CWEL) Program. While these two programs represent collaborations between state and county governments and two different universities, they were designed to complement each other and to prevent duplication of effort. This was achieved by basing both programs on the fundamental philosophy and standardized program elements of the Comprehensive, Competency-Based In-Service Training (CCBIT) model developed by Ronald Hughes and Judith Rycus of the Institute for Human Services (IHS) in Columbus, Ohio.

Systemic competency-based training using this model was developed and first implemented in a statewide system in Ohio in 1985. The Ohio Department of Human Services, the Public Children Services Association of Ohio, and IHS implemented a collaborative statewide training system that would promote the standardization of best practices throughout a large and highly diverse state while addressing a variety of local and individual training needs.

The CCBIT system incorporates an 11-step process to achieve its goals. According to Hughes and Rycus, these steps are as follows:

1. Define the specific populations of employees to be trained by the system.
2. Guided by explicit values-based and clearly defined standards of practice, identify the job responsibilities and activities of targeted employees necessary to promote achievement of the organization's mission and to achieve best practices.
3. Identify the prerequisite knowledge and skills (competencies) necessary for the performance of each identified job responsibility.
4. Organize competencies into a coherent hierarchy, and formalize them into a standardized universe of competencies that "drives" the entire training system.
5. Use the competencies to identify individual training needs, by asking two fundamental questions: What do I need to know to do my job? and What don't I know? High-priority training needs result when competencies are very important to a trainee's job and the trainee needs considerable development in these skill areas. This process is formalized through utilization of an Individual Training Needs Assessment Instrument (ITNA).

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6. Use the competencies to identify, adapt, or develop appropriate training curricula and to organize the curricula into modules that promote the orderly, logical, and sequential acquisition and mastery of complex knowledge and skills.
7. Recruit, screen, approve, and train qualified trainers to deliver training to adult learners in an applied setting and determine in which particular competencies each trainer will be approved to teach.
8. Utilizing compiled ITNA data, develop a training plan that schedules appropriate training at the regional or local level to address the highest-priority training needs.
9. Deliver training according to the training plan.
10. Implement systemwide strategies to promote the transfer of learning, ensuring that newly acquired knowledge and skills are used and further developed in the workplace.
11. Using standardized evaluation methods, evaluate the effectiveness of training at multiple levels.

Pennsylvania has used the CCBIT model as the foundation of its CBT Program and for the statewide child welfare graduate education specialization program (the CWEL Program). The adoption of a consistent philosophy, a common universe of competencies, and common program elements, such as use of the ITNA, has made integration of these two initiatives possible.

Pennsylvania's Child Welfare Competency-Based Training and Certification Program.

In March 1986, at a western regional meeting of county children and youth administrators, several participants expressed a strong interest in developing training resources for their staff, and they began to explore a variety of options for such training. It was agreed that training must be of the highest quality if it was to be accepted by all county agencies and successful at changing practice. The following features were ultimately deemed essential for a statewide training system:

- Training should be consumer driven and responsive to the needs of caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators in county children and youth agencies.
- Training must be dynamic and constantly improving to meet the changing needs of practitioners.
- Trainers should have previous or current child welfare practice experience and should be formally evaluated and approved to train in the system.
- Training must be available and accessible to all practitioners.
- There should be some form of "certification" for persons who have completed a standardized course of training.

Workers and students attend a competency-based training session.

County administrators began to survey training programs in other states to learn which, if any, met these expectations. Ohio's competency-based model was highly rated, as was South Carolina's certification program. Strengths of the Ohio model included its individualization of training based on identified needs; its adherence to stringent standards for trainers and curricula; and its regional-training-center (RTC) approach, which made training easily available to all staff throughout the state. In October 1986, Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators, Inc. (PCYA), endorsed the initial efforts of the western regional administrators and voted to pursue the development of a statewide training and certification program. In support of the PCYA initiative, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (DPW) assigned staff to assist with the effort, and by June 1987 funding had been allocated.

The search for a provider began in November 1988 and centered on national organizations and Pennsylvania's schools of social work. The proposal from IHS offered several advantages, including regionally delivered training and a core curriculum based upon standardized competencies that had been developed by child welfare professionals. The IHS proposal was selected, and work on the CBT Program began in early 1989.

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Pennsylvania's comprehensive approach to the training and education of public child welfare staff recognizes that preservice, in-service, and continuing education for both bachelor's- and master's-level workers is absolutely essential in a rapidly changing environment.

Now entering its seventh year of continuous operation, the CBT Program is managed by Shippensburg University. The university is responsible for the development, approval, and certification of trainers; facilitation of the activities of the eight RTCs; program evaluation; and budget development. The university social work department also offers continuing education units that apply toward social work licensure. Training activities are scheduled, delivered, and administered through seven county-based RTCs and one operated by Shippensburg. The RTCs ensure that appropriate training to meet high priority needs is scheduled and delivered in each region.

Amendments to Pennsylvania's Child Protective Service Law in July 1995 furthered the early vision of certification by requiring DPW to establish a statewide training and certification program for direct service workers in county children and youth agencies. In implementing the amendments, DPW mandated that direct service workers complete 120 hours of core training, the ITNA, and appropriate sections from Pennsylvania's Orientation, Training, and Resource Manual (OTRM) within their first 18 months of employment. The CBT Program was assigned the lead role in implementing these requirements. The central elements of this program are core training, the OTRM, the ITNA, and ongoing training.

Standardized core training consists of 120 hours of training in nine workshops, which impart the fundamental attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to provide high-quality, family-centered, culturally competent services to protect abused and neglected children and strengthen their families.

Core workshops 100 through 104 (Table 1) are based on a curriculum developed by IHS. They were updated in 1996, utilizing feedback from child welfare staff in Pennsylvania. Core workshops 105 through 108 were developed by the CBT Program with input from its Quality Assurance Committee, whose membership consists of supervisors from public child welfare agencies.

Table 1. Core Workshops

- CORE 100 Legal (12 hours)
- CORE 101 Child Protective Services (18 hours)
- CORE 102 Casework Process and Case Planning (24 hours)
- CORE 103 The Effects of Abuse and Neglect on Child Development (18 hours)
- CORE 104 Separation and Placement in Child Protective Services (18 hours)
- CORE 105 Adoption (6 hours)
- CORE 106 Risk Assessment: The Pennsylvania Model (12 hours)
- CORE 107 Family Preservation (6 hours)
- CORE 108 Valuing Diversity (6 hours)

Orientation, Training, and Resource Manual

The OTRM was a collaborative developmental effort of the CBT Program and IHS. It was designed to help supervisors orient new caseworkers to their jobs and to promote the transfer of learning from core training to the workplace. The OTRM also includes a series of activities that initially prepare workers to attend core modules that then help them apply what they have learned on their jobs. Activities include shadowing experienced workers, viewing videotapes, reading relevant sections of the Field Guide to Child Welfare and journal articles, completing case-related assignments, and practicing new skills, all under the guidance of the new workers' direct supervisors. The OTRM also serves as a tool in helping supervisors be more effective in using job coaching and on-the-job training to address their more experienced staff's learning needs.

The Individual Training Needs Assessment

The ITNA uses the Universe of Competencies as the criteria to measure each staff person's training needs. The ITNA was revised in 1996 to reflect changes in over 150 competencies needed for child welfare practice in Pennsylvania. Data from the ITNA are used by both the CBT and the CWEL Programs in the recruitment of trainers, the development and scheduling of training and course work, the development of workshops and curricula, and the assignment of trainees and students to particular courses. In consultation with their employees, supervisors complete the ITNA on an annual basis.

Ongoing Training

Offering specialized and related training, the CBT Program addresses the ongoing needs of new and veteran staff members. Quarterly training calendars disseminate information about training opportunities. Training is based on the compiled results of the ITNAs. County agencies register their staff for training by contacting their RTC. If space is available, staff may attend courses outside of their home training region. Training may also be scheduled at the request of one or more county children and youth agencies to address an identified special training need.

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Dramatic, statistically significant increases were found in the competencies of all students, further validating the program.

During the 1995–96 fiscal year, the CBT program provided more that 911 days of training to 3,080 child welfare workers in Pennsylvania (an unduplicated count). These same workers attended 11,658 days of training. It is anticipated that CBT will provide over 1,200 days of training in the 1996–97 fiscal year.

The Child Welfare Education for Leadership Program

Pennsylvania's comprehensive approach to the training and education of public child welfare staff recognizes that preservice, in-service, and continuing education for both bachelor's- and master's-level workers is absolutely essential in a rapidly changing environment. Virtually everyone agrees that worker training can improve services. However, a comprehensive approach to competence and stability must also address workers' levels of formal educational preparation for assessing and intervening in the complex family problems and administrative decisions that are seen in every child welfare agency.

The many benefits of professional education for child welfare workers have been clearly documented in the social work literature—for example, the national study of 5,360 child welfare personnel by Lieberman et al. and the extensive review of studies and evaluation that Helfgott carried out in a number of states—document the relevance of social work education. These studies and others have repeatedly shown significant benefits to families, agencies, and taxpayers, as well as to students and employees. The benefits of collaboration between child welfare agencies and institutions of higher education have also been widely acknowledged. The degree most commonly sought for child welfare practitioners is the MSW.

For over 25 years, the University of Pittsburgh has offered a concentration in serving children and families within its MSW program. By 1990, a number of demonstration and pilot projects were under way in Pennsylvania to develop further professional educational opportunities for child welfare practitioners. Many of these initiatives were designed to complement the statewide CBT Program.

The most significant, and consistent, financial support for these initiatives came from federal sources, particularly the Social and Rehabilitation Service, the National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect, and the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families. Over a number of years, these sources funded student recruitment, curriculum development, and development of faculty resources. An important nine-year initiative was the development of an interdisciplinary approach to child abuse and neglect and child welfare education by the university. Interdisciplinary courses were developed using curriculum content and faculty from the schools and departments of child development and child care, law, medicine, nursing, psychology, public health, and social work. These courses were then institutionalized into an interdisciplinary certificate program offered by the university.

In another initiative, paid internships were established within public child welfare agencies, in an attempt to demonstrate the benefits of professional education on agency recruitment and retention, as well as the career benefits for individual students.

Training agreements under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act were negotiated with several county agencies to enroll small numbers of students part-time in MSW programs. These contracts demonstrated the feasibility of fiscal and contractual arrangements to promote professional education that would improve services to families. From the beginning, the curriculum offered in these programs was designed to incorporate the child welfare competencies initially developed by IHS and modified by the CBT Program. Pennsylvania thus established a recognized set of competencies for both preservice education and in-service training, preventing repetition and duplication of course work or curricula and creating a sequence of mutually enhancing learning experiences for students and employees. All students, both MSW and interdisciplinary, were assessed on the competencies at the time they entered the program, at a midpoint, and upon completion. Dramatic, statistically significant increases were found in the competencies of all students, further validating the program.

By 1994, all of the CWEL Program elements had been tested and refined, with these results:

- A formal system of contracting and making Title IV-E claims had been approved in Pennsylvania's IV-B Plan to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and field-tested with county children and youth agencies.
- An extensive interdisciplinary and competency-based curriculum had been implemented, offering over 25 child-welfare-specific graduate courses.
- Students completing the program were receiving favorable reviews from their agencies as a result of their newly acquired knowledge and skills.
- The commitment of the university to preparing practitioners for public agency practice and to supporting the complex agreements required for implementation was firmly established.

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Participants in an annual trainer conference visit one of the exhibition booths.

- The demand from prospective students and county agencies was intense.

A missing element from this otherwise glowing picture was accessibility to the program statewide. The program was primarily serving students and agencies within commuting distance of the University of Pittsburgh. Missing also was consistent support from DPW and any cohesive design to expand opportunities on a statewide basis. Extensive exploratory and planning sessions with both state and federal officials followed, in which all parties sought to develop a strategy and a model to establish such a statewide program. In response to the great need in local agencies and aided by the availability of Title IV-E funds, a tentative agreement was reached to expand the program throughout the state.

The CWEL Program represents a collaborative agreement between the University of Pittsburgh, DPW, and five other Pennsylvania graduate schools of social work. The program's purpose is to prepare social workers for leadership positions in child welfare upon graduation. The graduate social work curriculum includes both standardized course work to meet basic requirements and courses that address the individual educational needs of the students. The child-welfare-related courses were designed to be consistent with, and to complement, the core curriculum of the CBT Program. These elements, plus adherence to a common set of competencies, create a coordinated and integrated series of learning experiences for students in both the in-service and the university settings.

The success of the CWEL Program has rested upon the key elements of state and county support, the development of a statewide consortium of six graduate social work schools, and the acquisition of matching funds. DPW has strongly supported the CWEL Program, particularly as its positive effects have become apparent. This support has endured through two administrations, increasing during the present administration of Gov. Tom Ridge.

The CWEL Program has also received strong support from PCYA, which worked with DPW and the University of Pittsburgh to develop policies that allowed county staff to access graduate social work education more easily. This initiative has assumed high priority in the PCYA strategic plan. A former county children and youth administrator was hired by the CWEL Program to assist counties around policy development and program implementation. At the request of DPW, Westmoreland and Cumberland Counties have each managed the annual the CWEL Program contract with the University of Pittsburgh. CWEL Program staff routinely meet, both individually and collectively, with children and youth administrators to review policies, evaluate the program's effectiveness, and troubleshoot potential problems.

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Increased accessibility of the program to prospective students is one measure of the successful involvement of the CWEL Program with county agencies. Although the majority of students come from metropolitan Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, the program has involved students from small county agencies as well, including many from largely rural areas. Within the first 18 months of the CWEL Program's existence, 30 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties enrolled students and employees, and more than half of these were rural counties.

The unique problems of small county agencies can pose significant barriers to utilization of the program. With small staffs and limited applicants for open positions, a two-year educational leave for their best employees can place significant stress on county agencies. To respond to the need for full-time employees to attend graduate school, the CWEL Program expanded the availability of part-time graduate positions. The technical assistance and support from program staff enabled many to recognize the long-term benefits of the program. In many instances program staff were able to assist counties in developing policies for flexible work schedules or educational leaves.

Another strength of the CWEL Program is the consortium of six graduate social work programs. Each school offers a curriculum that is specific to child welfare while also addressing the individual training needs identified in the student's or employee's ITNA. This process ensures an educational plan that meets the student's needs, the agency's expectations, and Title IV-E's requirements for reimbursement. The student or employee, the university, and the county agency commit to a contract that describes the duties, responsibilities, and obligations of each party.

A final challenge has been acquiring the required nonfederal matching funds which must exceed 25 percent. Only two of the six accredited MSW programs in the CWEL Program are public institutions: the University of Pittsburgh and Temple University. The remaining four— Bryn Mawr College, Marywood College, the University of Pennsylvania, and Widener University— are private schools. The CWEL Program's match initially came from DPW and the University of Pittsburgh. Most of the match resulted from the difference between the University of Pittsburgh's U.S. Department of Health and Human Services–approved indirect cost rate, and the 8 percent indirect cost rate that it actually received. Because Pennsylvania's children and youth system is county administered, the state granted approval to select county agencies to contract with the University of Pittsburgh to administer a statewide Title IV-E degree program and then allocated the state's match to the county agencies. The selected county agencies either have been pilots, with which the university had initially designed a graduate education program, or have had prior experience administering statewide contracts, such as the one with Shippensburg University for the CBT Program.

Conclusion

The development of a statewide competency-based child welfare training program is not unusual. Further, the institution of a statewide Title IV-E degree program for child welfare employees is by no means unique to Pennsylvania. What is perhaps the most distinguishing feature of Pennsylvania's approach to comprehensive child welfare education and training is its origins as an interdisciplinary, competency-based program that attempts to integrate university education with formal in-service training.

The Pennsylvania model is based on the premise that neither in-service training nor graduate social work education alone can meet the needs of child welfare practitioners. A fully integrated sequence of learning activities that promote common standards of best practice, yet are responsive to the individual learning needs of students, is necessary to achieve high levels of practice proficiency. To this end, both the CBT and the CWEL Programs base all learning activities on a common universe of competencies needed by staff to work in the child welfare field. Mandated training in core competencies provides foundation-level knowledge and skills for new employees. The OTRM and its associated resources strengthen the acquisition and transfer of fundamental job skills. The ITNA identifies job-specific and specialized competencies of each learner in the service system and of each student in the CWEL Program. The CBT and the CWEL Programs provide training and education that address these learning needs. Both programs evaluate their performance by using measures of competency, and both have seen significant gains in the knowledge and skill levels of their participants.

Although Pennsylvania has made considerable progress in providing quality training and education, additional work remains. Efforts are needed to get approved curricula into Pennsylvania's many bachelor's of sccial work programs. There is some duplication of training and education, and work is needed to decide which competencies are best addressed in preservice, in-service, specialized, or degree settings. To date, the demand for graduate education has exceeded the CWEL Program's capacity of 50 students and employees. Further, some child welfare employees indicate a need for graduate social work education, but cannot meet the stringent academic acceptance standards for the participating CWEL Programs. Additionally, as practice and legislation evolve, so will the competencies required by workers and the education and training needed to address them. *PW*

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